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ABSTRACT

The traditional upper-level course in French civilization at Utah State University was abandoned in favor of a course entitled "France Today," taught once a year to a consistent enrollment of students majoring in a wide variety of disciplines. The content varies somewhat each year, but the class typically begins with several class periods devoted to discussing perceptions and stereotypes of France, focusing on serious topics such as living conditions and culture shock and on lighthearted topics such as "franglais." Several subsequent classes are spent discussing the country's history and government. After the first exam, an open book-closed book test, discussion moves to France's role in world and European geography, economy, and culture. The next ten class meetings are spent in imaginary travel in France, accompanied by audiovisual materials and discussions of lifestyles, regional character, food, and leisure. After a second exam, two class meetings are spent examining a variety of topics, using culture capsules found in textbooks or personally created by the teacher. The last four classes are used to study gestures, using slides and live demonstrations and encouraging lively student participation. A number of examples of test questions are included in the document. (MSE)

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A FRENCH CULTURE COURSE FOR NON-LANGUAGE MAJORS

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A French Culture Course for Non-language Majors

There are many ways of measuring success in our foreign language classroom. The standard barometer we use most often, perhaps, is "Have my students made significant advances in one or more of the four language skills"? Unfortunately, our administrators, those who calculate FTEs and decide on budget allocations, salary increases, promotion, and tenure, use other barometers. For these powers-that-be, the bottom line is, all too often, enrollment.

When I arrived at Utah State University in the early 1970s, the course with the lowest enrollment in the Department of Languages and Philosophy was French 420, the venerable "La Civilisation française." French 420 had been taught in French (since the Middle Ages, probably) every other year following the all too familiar method: chapter after chapter of names and dates pertaining to but not explaining art, music, geography, history, castles. Memorize facts for the exam. Forget facts after the exam. Confuse facts during the exam (Was it François I^{er} who built the château d'Amboise or Ançois I^{er} who built the château de Framboise?). Only French majors signed up for French 420--it was required. Students hated taking the course; teachers hated

teaching it.

I would like to describe here how "La Civilisation française," our lowest-enrollment (potentially most boring and probably most useless) upper-division French course became, in two years, our highest-enrollment and most attractive upper-division class.

In short, the traditional French 420 was junked. And, lo and behold, as far as can be ascertained, no one died as a result. No one even complained! "France Today"--French 320--stepped in. The course is taught in English, and its content differs completely from what had been taught in previous years. The three-credit-hour class is offered during Spring quarter every year with approximately thirty students enrolling annually. Our handful of French majors now sit alongside majors in business, economics, computer science, political science, and pre-law. Student evaluations indicate a very high degree of satisfaction. What makes "France Today" so attractive?

The main dilemma faced yearly when preparing the syllabus for this course is deciding what to cover in twenty-eight fifty-minute meetings, two of which are for testing. However, this dilemma is to a great extent responsible for the success of "France Today." Bluntly speaking, when you cannot teach everything you would like to teach or feel has to be taught, eliminate the boring and the tedious and use the most interesting and stimulating. (This luxury, alas, does not exist for grammar classes.) French art and music, as great as they may be, will turn on very, very few students. These happy few can turn to the

appropriate departments for more extensive coursework in these areas. Teach French gestures instead! Now that will interest all your students; they will tell their friends who will tell their friends and, voilà, you have future enrollment! Here, in extended detail, is an outline of the content of a typical French 320 course.

The first four class periods are devoted to "France in your Mind." The opening lecture (after distribution of the syllabus, etc.) centers on stereotyping: what is it, why does it occur, dangers. Where do cultural "concepts" originate (books, films, soldiers returning home, etc.)? What are some of the concepts the French have of the United States and of Americans? Some are serious (Americans are obsessed with money); some are silly (All Americans always put ketchup on everything). For the second class period, the students are asked to list the concepts they have of France and of the French. There are the basic "Five Bs" to begin with: bread, beret, bicycle, Brigitte Bardot. Then, of course, since all men are seducers and all women are loose, paramours abound. Fortunately, most students will quickly realize that any generalized statement regarding particular cultures should be examined closely in order to sort out what is valid from what is incomplete, superficial, or patently idiotic. This is also the moment to introduce the one characteristic overused when describing the French--the ubiquitous individualité.

The major part of the third and fourth meetings concentrates on discussion of a short article by Arthur Gordon on culture shock and an excerpt from Edward T. Hall's The Hidden Dimension.

In "How to Cope With Culture Shock," Gordon describes the symptoms of the malady and expands anthropologist Kalervo Oberg's description of the four typical stages of this "silent sickness": the honeymoon stage, the hostile and aggressive stage, the early recovery stage, and, finally, the near-complete adjustment stage. Gordon concludes with suggestions on how to "shorten the duration of culture shock or minimize its impact."[1] In the excerpt cited from his seminal work, Hall describes how crowded living conditions in France normally result in high sensory involvement and how this affects everything from architecture and automobile design to interpersonal encounters. He goes on to contrast the two major European systems for patterning space, the "radiating star" which is sociopetal and the "grid" which is sociofugal, and describes how the former pattern, evident in France, permeates the entire culture from the road networks down to the highly centralized pattern of the French school system.[2]

Between discussions of these more serious topics, it is well worth inserting brief items of a less serious nature, some of which may even relate to the subject in question. Students will always enjoy reading Art Buchwald's well-known letter "Dear Mary--Come Home," learning the origin of numbers (why do Europeans cross the number seven), and even realizing that French animals do not speak like their American counterparts.[3] A few enjoyable minutes can be spent discussing and offering examples of "franglais." Culture assimilators and mini-dramas can be used quite advantageously at this point also; short and often humorous, they can vividly present a gamut of consequences conceived in cultural

ignorance, from minor misunderstandings quickly forgiven and forgotten to grievous insults of a personal nature not so easily, if ever, excused.

Few nowadays would disagree that individuals whose profession brings them in contact with foreigners should be aware that significant cultural differences likely exist. Being aware of this situation is the most important first step. Thereafter, a lifetime will probably not suffice to learn all of the differences. In the language classroom one can begin learning about cultural diversity and realize what some of the potential danger areas are.

The third year I taught "France Today," a young faculty member who had been teaching English to foreign students for eight years audited the class. Our classroom discussions concerning cultural differences and stereotyping sparked an idea in her which she shared with a colleague who had been teaching English to foreign students for over a decade. Together, they developed a new course, "Analysis of Cross-Cultural Difference," Linguistics 390, with FTEs accruing to the Department of Languages and Philosophy. All foreign language majors may apply the three credits earned in this class toward their degrees. The course description reads in part as follows:

> This course is designed to give students an awareness of what culture is and how it shapes perceptions and attitudes. The objective is not to give information about specific cultures, but rather to provide students with intercultural experiences (simulations, role plays, and field-work

projects) which will introduce them to methods for analyzing, understanding, and coping with cultures or sub-cultures other than their own.

The course will be useful to students who are interested in travel and study abroad, foreign language teaching, bilingual education, minority problems, international business, law, politics, military science, and psychology. (Taught in English.)

This new course, an excellent complement to "France Today," has garnered high praise since its first year and continues to attract approximately thirty students annually. Bottom line: the powers-that-be are delighted.

II

The fifth through seventh class meetings of "France Today" are spent discussing the history of France and the history of the French government. A student once summarized these classes as "Absolutely everything you need to know about the history and government of France capsulized in large print on 36 small pages." The reference is to two chapters assigned as reading in France: Its People and Culture.[4] Although these readings offer only a bird's-eye view of the subjects in question, the view is sufficient for this particular course and gives some points of reference which will be useful in many of the discussions to come. For example, on a concrete level, when Normandy, Brittany, Champagne, etc, are discussed in future classes, students will (should) recall the historical role played by these provinces in the past. On an abstract level, being aware of France's uncanny

ability to swing back and forth between monarchies, empires, and republics, which were interspersed with revolutions of varying length and severity, could be helpful to the students when later discussions of French characteristics (such as individualism) occur.

A student specializing in French should certainly have a broad knowledge of French history and government; therefore we encourage our majors to take these types of classes in the History and/or Political Science Departments. Easily 90% of those enrolled in French 320 are not majoring in French, and thus the cursory presentation of history and government is ample. Class time is precious, for many facets of the Hexagon still remain to be revealed--facets perhaps better understood and appreciated because of a study of French history and government, albeit brief and superficial.

Yet, although class time is precious, the eighth class is taken up, alas, by the first exam which consists of two parts: (1) an open-book section on the history and government material, for I see no great advantage in having students memorize hundreds of dates and names of kings, etc.; and (2) a closed-book section on the remainder of the material (i.e., "France in your Mind"). The types of questions vary from year to year but are the basic run-of-the-mill perennial variety: multiple-choice, true/false-correct, matching, fill-in-the-blank(s), and short-answer (50 words maximum). In this manner, much material can be tested while avoiding essay questions, certainly to the great relief of this teacher and probably to many of my students. But for testers

who prefer this type of torture (applied and/or self-inflicted) there should be no problem in formulating interesting and valid questions. Personally, I prefer a more direct approach similar to this: "In general, what do the French think of the manner in which American women dress? Explain briefly." Or, "According to all of the authors we have read, what is the French characteristic which seems to explain anything and everything occurring in the past, present, or future in France? Explain briefly."

III

The ninth class meeting is titled "France in the World" and it is at this moment, every spring, that I become amazed at the realization that certain individuals were able to become great teachers before the invention of the photocopying machine. (It boggles the mind to imagine what more Thomas Aquinas, for example, could have accomplished with a Xerox machine available just a few feet away!) From the ninth through the twenty-first class meeting, some 200 pages of handouts are distributed to each student. Photocopying is easier than other methods of reproduction and certainly more pleasing to the eyes of the reader. The costs incurred are covered by part of a lab fee ($3.00) assessed each student.

The lecture "France in the World" is designed to give the students a perspective of France perhaps new to them and which will be explained at the end of this section. The following questions on a recent exam give some idea of the points covered. Most students answered all of the items correctly. The answers are indicated within parentheses, intelligence for which some

students would pay dearly.

A) True/false-correct. The underlined words are true and cannot be changed. If the statement is false, mark it so and then correct the error(s).

1. Of all of the areas in the world (Asia, Africa, North America, etc.), Europe has the smallest per cent of total land area (less than 5%) and the lowest population density per square mile in the world. (False, the highest population density)
2. In Western Europe, only the United Kingdom, West Germany, and Spain have a population greater than France's. (False, replace "Spain" with "Italy")
3. In 1980, the city of Paris (excluding suburbs) ranked only number 16 in population, world-wide. (False, number 60)
4. The population of Paris AND its suburbs represents about 20% of the entire population of France. (True)
5. The USA is 15 times larger than Europe. (False, than France)
6. Area-wise, Utah is about the same size as France. (False, about one-half the size)

B) Short-answer questions.

1. Approximately how many countries are there in the world? (167)
2. Area-wise, how many countries in the world are larger than France? (42)
3. Population-wise, how many countries in the world have a

population greater than France's? (14)

4. What is the only country in Western Europe (i.e., excluding the USSR) that is larger than France in area? (None)

5. Specifically, why was Montreal mentioned in class in connection with the French language? (It is the city with the second-largest population of native French speakers. Only Paris has more.)

6. Explain why French is so commonly used in Africa today. (Belgium and France and their colonial history, etc.)

C) Multiple-choice.

1. France has an area of approximately

   a. 109,465 square miles.

   b. 212,973 square miles.

   c. 53,290 square miles.

   d. None of the above. (b is correct)

2. In 1980, the population of the city of Paris, excluding suburbs, was approximately

   a. 10,500,000.

   b. 1,290,900.

   c. 4,920,000.

   d. None of the above. (d is correct. The answer is 2,200,000 and the figure was used repeatedly in class.)

D) Fill-in-the-blank(s).

1. In area, the USSR is the largest country in the world. The second largest is _____. (Canada is the answer and no one ever believes it!)

2. _____ is 40 times larger than France. (The USSR)

It may seem difficult to believe, but students actually enjoy the class "France in your Mind." This is perhaps so because the entire lecture is typed out, duplicated, and distributed to them at the beginning of the period. The entire lecture minus the key figures and names, that is. Such information is left blank and all (well, some) participate in trying to supply the missing elements. This approach helps stem boredom or confusion or both and makes obvious important material for the exam. The last page of the handout is a world map indicating all countries and areas where French is the native tongue or commonly spoken. The map also makes clear France's geographical position and its size in comparison with other countries.

Thus, much information is disseminated in fifty minutes in a fashion which seems appreciated. The summation of the lecture attempts to direct the students toward that perspective of France so important to keep in mind: consider the relatively small size of France, then examine its incredible history; its imposing contributions in the fields of art, music, science and literature; and its position in today's world: fourth trade and industrial power in the Western world, third space power and third nuclear power. And in this area a little more than twice the size of Utah are found one of the world's most famous cities, one of the world's most famous rivers, one of the world's most famous cathedrals, most famous mountain chains, and mountain peaks. Is France not incredible? All of this ... plus French bread and

cheese!

IV

Two class periods (the tenth and eleventh) are devoted to "France in Europe." Zoom in from the global view of the previous lecture: France is halfway between the North Pole and the Equator (45 degrees latitude North, 0 degrees longitude--the Greenwich Meridian-- etc.), just happens to be near the Atlantic and therefore greatly influenced by the Gulf Stream. Next, hand out a map of France and the surrounding countries and bodies of water, but make life difficult and replace all names with numbers and have the students identify the items. It rarely fails: someone will label England as Denmark. Distribute a map showing all of Europe and Northern Africa, again all names replaced with numbers, and go through the identification process. This is the perfect time to introduce some of the following topics:

(1) Describe Gaul and the invasions by the Celts, Franks, Romans, Saracens (Charles Martel, 732, Poitiers and all of that), Normans (who will expand their territory in 1066), and why is all of this important? (France as a crucible, etc.)

(2) Romance Languages.

(3) Which of these countries are monarchies or principalities?

(4) Monaco. Monte Carlo. Grace Kelly.

(5) Andorra. The president of the French republic is automatically also the co-prince of the principality and for his services receives 960 francs in odd-numbered years,

whereas the bishop of Urgel (in Spain), the other co-prince, gets 24 francs, six hams, six chickens and six cheeses in even-numbered years!

(6) The "Chunnel"--the on-again-off-again project originally proposed in 1802. This topic provides the perfect opportunity to discuss Anglo-French relationships over the years.

(7) The European Economic Community and the European Parliament.

(8) NATO.

It is at this point in the course when you may just happen to find at home those marvelous slides you once took in Monaco or Andorra, or those lovely postcards you brought back with you. Do your students a favor and use them!

Eventually, your students will <u>want</u> to be tested on this new material and you will have to oblige them, naturally. Again here, true/false-correct, short-answer, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank(s) work well and are appreciated. A multiple-choice with one <u>or more</u> answers covers a lot of territory. Two examples from a recent exam:

1. The "Chunnel"
   a. was built between 1952 and 1969.
   b. was half completed when World War II broke out. Work was halted between 1939 and 1945, continued from 1945 until 1948, and stopped at that point on the orders of Charles de Gaulle who did not particularly trust the English. Pompidou, de Gaulle's successor, order-

ed construction work taken up again in 1969.

c. is expected to be completed next year.

d. is just a project. Actual construction on a large scale has never begun.

e. will link France to Holland also.

f. is an idea first introduced to Napoleon I.

g. None of the above. (d and f are correct)

2. Which of the following countries does (do) NOT belong to the Common Market?

a. Spain

b. Portugal

c. Switzerland

d. Austria

e. Norway

f. Denmark (a, b, c, d, e were correct at the time)

Finally, the most-often missed question is the following true/false-correct statement: "France is halfway between the North Pole and the South Pole." Can this be considered a "trick question"? Let us have a show of hands, please.

Having discussed "France in your Mind/in the World/in Europe," it is now time to zoom in closer in order to study the country itself. Or, as I tell my students, THE country itself.

V

The remainder of the course is my favorite time of the year. I refer to the teaching year, naturally. Savoie's golden rule of the "Four Fs in the Classroom" is so easy to apply at this point: "For success, give the students Fun, Food, Films and Fantasies!"

Fantasies of travelling in France because you, the teacher, have made the country and everything in it so unique and appealing.

Ten class meetings (periods 12 through 21) constitute what is called "France Inside." So much to say, so much to see, so much to do, in so little time. Be selective! Be on the lookout for good slides, filmstrips, and films. And especially, with today's generation--I almost wrote degeneration--be on the lookout for good video cassette programs, a new blessing, perhaps even greater than the blessed photocopying machine. Good fresh Brie and Camembert will be appreciated also.

I suggest beginning with the obvious: a map showing the major mountain ranges, five or six rivers, plains, and a dozen or so cities, plus a second map indicating fourteen or fifteen major provinces. After this, I simply take my students on a "tour de France," beginning on the Côte d'Azur and working counterclockwise: up the Rhône Valley (yes, we do sing "Sur le Pont d'Avignon"), through Burgundy, into Alsace-Lorraine, westward through Champagne, Ile-de-France, Normandy, Brittany, then south to the Landes and the Basque country (ah! the fandango and pelota) and, finally, back to the Midi and, of course, Corsica.

I tend to say as little as possible, if anything at all, about industries and demography and other stimulating, intellectual topics, but rather focus on such items as (perceived) regional differences in character or life-style (the supposedly lazy but sympa southerner always inclined to brag; the grasping and sly Norman, according to the rest of the French, but simply prudent according to the Norman); or regional culinary special-

ties. Pâté and truffles are always a rich topic (great post-cards!) and present the perfect opportunity to discuss the French penchant for liver ailments. From there, it requires but the briefest step to get into mineral waters and spas, always a source of great classroom entertainment. Duplicate and hand out recipes for beef bourguignon, coq au vin and onion soup; and always accept the students' invitation to have a crêpe-party (unless it has to take place in <u>your</u> kitchen!). As you "travel" with your students through France, take them to Mont-Saint-Michel, Carnac, Beaubourg. Explore with them the historic châteaux and then wander through the French gardens. Visit the great churches and cathedrals and explain the differences between the Roman and Gothic styles. As the perfect "classroom guide" you will soon become frustrated because there is so much to say, so much to see, so much to do, in so little time. Be selective! And if a picture is worth a thousand words, just imagine how much a 16mm film or a video cassette program is worth! Create those fantasies!

The quickest manner of bringing all of this fun and frolicking to a sudden (but temporary) halt is to have the second major exam (day 22). Examples of questions for "France in the World" and "France in Europe" were suggested earlier. Similar masterpieces can be concocted for "France Inside."

1. A famous folk dance typically performed by the Bretons is the "<u>fandango</u>." (False, by the Basques)
2. Which of the following statements is (are) <u>NOT</u> correct?
   a. The roads found in the Alps are better than the

roads found in the Pyrenees and have been so for years.

b. Tourism is a year-round industry in the Alps.

c. The Massif Central is a higher mountain range than the Alps.

d. When arriving at the base of the Pyrenees (except at the eastern and western extremities), one often finds a veritable block of mountains rather than a gradual ascent.

e. The French government, for years, has attempted to destroy the spa industry in France because this industry is simply a justification for casino establishments.

f. French citizens who go to spas for medical care can quite often actually receive Social Security reimbursements for some or all of the costs incurred.

(c, e, are the answers)

And, of course, a map with rivers, mountain ranges, and cities to draw in or identify and a map with provinces to name.

VI

Days 23 and 24 are spent examining a potpourri of topics, using various culture capsules found in textbooks or personally created over the years. The obvious advantage to this approach is its efficiency. One can offer very quickly and very succinctly numerous doses of information regarding France and its people, anything from religion to mass media via eating habits, dating habits, driving licences, tipping, truffles, and tripes.

We have, indeed, zoomed in even closer. This is, in fact, a study of the "stuff" that makes up the daily life of a French human being. It should help a student understand better the French way of life and realize even to a greater extent that "they" do not do everything like "we" do. Obviously, it does not and should not attempt to prove one culture superior to the other; it simply points out differences and reveals new facets to be examined. The Hexagon continues to be uncovered and discovered. And if someday the student visits France, the culture shock inevitably felt should be somewhat easier to cope with and the stay a much richer experience.

VII

Is it possible to zoom in even more? Can we look into the French mind? Obviously yes! One of the ways of doing this is to study French gestures. And this is how the last four classes of French 320 are spent. These are, without a doubt, the most enjoyable moments of the course, the ones former students mention years later.

After an introduction of approximately twenty minutes offering a "professorial" explanation apropos of gestures, I turn on the slide projector and the students. What gestures I have failed to collect on celluloid, I manage to perform live. The meaning and usage of each gesture are explained in detail. An excellent source of information is Laurence Wylie's Beaux Gestes.[5] For example, he groups some gestures under the heading "Le Jemenfoutisme." Students, of course, love to mimic what they are often seeing for the first time. Encourage them! And leave the

classroom door open. Curious passers-by may decide to become future students of yours. Or one of the powers-that-be might happen to walk by and be touched by your scintillating performance.

Testing gestures is as simple as a snap. Make a gesture and ask a multiple-choice question about it. Example: "If a Frenchman makes this gesture to you, he is telling you in his very French way to ... a)_____, b)_____, c)_____." Or ask an identification question: "This gesture means _____." Or present a true/false-correct statement.

Learning about French gestures can be fun, certainly. More important, though, gestures are an integral part of a Frenchman's being and need to be thoroughly understood before one can profess valid claim to a true understanding of his culture. Furthermore, serious ignorance of the significance of a Frenchman's gestures may often preclude meaningful and rewarding penetration into his heart and mind and thus limit communication to a skin-deep level.[6]

VIII

We have travelled a long road, from "France in your Mind" all the way into the mind of the French. It is always with pleasant surprise and amazement at course's end that I reflect on how much my students have learned about France and her people in so short a time. Granted, it is obviously but a minuscule amount compared to "everything" one could learn over a lifetime of study and travel. Yet, for some, it has been the crucial first step of a journey, a sharpened awareness of a land far away so beautiful but so

different from ours, and the inception of a desire to know more of this special country, her history, her customs, her language, her people. She is a multifaceted jewel, a gem worthy of awe and well worth pursuing.

Notes

[1] Arthur Gordon, "How to Cope with Culture Shock," A Leader's Manual for Developing Cross-Cultural Awareness in Secondary Students Who Travel and Study Abroad in France, James E. Becker, University of Northern Iowa, 1978, 55-59.

[2] Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1966) 134-138.

[3] Art Buchwald, "Dear Mary--Come Home," rpt. and trans. with permission of the New York Herald Tribune, La France actuelle, Camille Bauer, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1971) 6-7.

[4] R. L. Walker, "The History of France," and Richard de Angelis, "French Government," France: Its People and Culture, Lynn M. Hilton, Editor-in-Chief, Focus on Europe Series (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co., 1980) 1-36.

[5] Lawrence Wylie, Beaux Gestes (Cambridge: The Undergraduate Press; New York: Dutton, 1977).

[6] Much of the statistical information used in this course and presented throughout this article comes from sources such as Information Please Almanac, published annually by A & W Publishers, Inc. (New York), and Time.